

Chapter 1. Introduction

Chinook salmon and bull trout have been listed under the Endangered Species Act as threatened in the Puget Sound region¹. Population numbers are declining, formerly available habitat has been blocked, and the remaining habitat—habitat on which all salmon species depend for survival—is losing the complex structure needed to keep the population fit and offer adaptive alternatives. Once designated as *threatened* or *endangered*, a species and its habitat are protected by federal law. While the Puget Sound region and individual planning units (called Water Resource Inventory Areas or WRIAs) develop long-term strategies for people to better co-exist with salmon, many of the WRIAs have been coordinating voluntary efforts to identify and undertake actions that will help salmon in the short-term. This Near-Term Action Agenda is one such effort.

In this report, the word *salmon* refers to all native species of salmon, steelhead, trout, and bull trout/Dolly Varden char.

The WRIA 9 Salmon Habitat Conservation Planning Process

The Near-Term Action Agenda has been developed by the Steering Committee, which was created to direct salmon conservation efforts in one of the Puget Sound basin planning units, Water Resource Inventory (WRIA) 9. WRIA 9 consists of the Green/Duwamish and Central Puget Sound watersheds² (Figure 1). The WRIA 9 Steering Committee was established in 1998 and consists of representatives from local, state, and federal governments, the environmental community, and businesses in the WRIA (a complete list of Steering Committee participants is provided at the beginning of this document). The WRIA 9 Steering Committee has three subcommittees that helped create the Near-Term Action Agenda: the Planning Work Group, the Technical Committee, and the Public Outreach Work Group. The Planning Work Group first developed and refined many of the ideas in the Near-Term Action Agenda. The Technical Committee and the Public Outreach Work Group also developed some of the studies and actions that are part of this Action Agenda.

The WRIA 9 Forum is a caucus of local governments represented by elected officials from the 16 jurisdictions within the WRIA³. These jurisdictions have an interlocal agreement to

¹ In March 1999, the National Marine Fisheries Service listed Puget Sound chinook salmon as a “threatened” species under the Endangered Species Act. In November 1999, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed bull trout as a “threatened” species under the Endangered Species Act.

² Please see Chapter 2 for a complete definition of WRIA 9.

³ The 16 governments that participate in this interlocal agreement are the cities of Algona, Auburn, Black Diamond, Burien, Covington, Des Moines, Enumclaw, Federal Way, Kent, Maple Valley, Normandy Park, Renton, SeaTac, Seattle, and Tukwila, and King County. In addition, the City of Tacoma signed the interlocal agreement in 2001 and will add its financial support to the WRIA 9 planning process beginning in 2002.

participate in the WRIA 9 salmon habitat conservation and recovery planning process and contract with King County to provide a small cost-shared staff. WRIA 9 planning also is supported financially by the Lead Entity Operational Grant Program administered by the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife.

WRIA 9 has developed a four-task approach to the salmon habitat conservation challenges it faces. Two tasks culminate in scientific reports and two conclude with action plans.

1. ***Habitat Limiting Factors and Reconnaissance Assessment Report.*** The *Reconnaissance Assessment* was completed in December 2000. This scientific report brings together existing information on conditions of salmon and salmon habitat in WRIA 9 both from the scientific literature and from local knowledge and expertise. It identifies important problems and factors that contribute to salmon decline and includes maps showing the distribution of salmon, by species, throughout WRIA 9. It also highlights current gaps in data and technical understanding. It is available on-line at:
<http://dnr.metrokc.gov/Wrias/9/TechnicalReports/TechnicalReports.htm>.

The *Reconnaissance Assessment* is supplemented by a similar report, completed in 2001, that provides information on the marine nearshore ecosystem of Puget Sound. The *Reconnaissance Assessment of the State of the Nearshore Ecosystem* report is available on-line at:
<http://dnr.metrokc.gov/wlr/watersheds/puget/nearshore/sonr.htm>.

2. ***Strategic Assessment.*** The Strategic Assessment will build on information in the *Habitat Limiting Factors and Reconnaissance Assessment* report described above. It will involve research to fill important information gaps, in particular those concerning the health of chinook salmon and bull trout. It will result in a more complete understanding of problems and opportunities in the watershed related to salmon and salmon habitat conservation and recovery, with a focus on the species listed as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act. The Strategic Assessment will be shaped by the issues that need to be addressed in the development of the Comprehensive Salmon Conservation Plan and will provide the scientific foundation for the Conservation Plan.
3. ***Near-Term Action Agenda.*** This Action Agenda outlines early, voluntary steps that can ameliorate some of the factors that are negatively affecting salmon and salmon habitat. The Near-Term Action Agenda is a guide to actions that local governments and other implementers can take over the next few years as resources and opportunities become available. It is an interim step that will remain in effect until the Conservation Plan is completed, and it is expected to serve as a building block for the Conservation Plan.

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Figure 1. Cities and Subwatersheds.

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4. ***Comprehensive Salmon Conservation Plan.*** The Comprehensive Salmon Conservation Plan will guide long-term habitat conservation and recovery actions in the watershed and is the ultimate product of the WRIA 9 planning process. A key component of the Conservation Plan will be an approach for adaptive management that will allow decision-makers to respond to the ever-deepening understanding of salmon habitat needs and opportunities for improving habitat in the WRIA. The WRIA 9 Steering Committee will guide development of the Conservation Plan during the period from 2002 to 2005, with the goal of completing the Conservation Plan in 2005. It can then be included by the National Marine Fisheries Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (or a designated state agency) in the broader salmon recovery plans for the entire Puget Sound region.

Salmon Conservation Planning in the Puget Sound Region

Salmon conservation planning similar to that occurring in WRIA 9 is also underway in nearby WRIsAs. In addition, three of the most populous counties in the Puget Sound region—Snohomish, King, and Pierce—have coordinated their planning for salmon habitat recovery through the Tri-County Endangered Species Act Response. The Tri-County effort brings together local governments, environmental groups, and businesses to address the habitat-related factors of salmon decline. One element of the Tri-County ESA Response is WRIA-level habitat conservation planning.

Individual WRIA and Tri-County salmon habitat conservation planning is expected to feed into the development of a broader Puget Sound-wide Shared Strategy. The Puget Sound Shared Strategy will attempt to create a Puget Sound-wide salmon recovery plan that ties together harvest management, hatchery practices, and habitat protection and restoration. The efforts of WRIA 9, along with those of other WRIsAs in the Puget Sound area, will inform and be informed by the Shared Strategy.

Ultimately, however, it is the National Marine Fisheries Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that will develop the official recovery plan for the whole Puget Sound region. That recovery plan will set numeric and other goals for recovery and the criteria for success, which is the delisting of chinook salmon and bull trout as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

Role of the Near-Term Action Agenda

The Near-Term Action Agenda for WRIA 9 recommends only selected actions. It is not a compendium of all actions that could benefit salmon. Actions included in this Near-Term Action Agenda meet both of the following criteria:

1. The action will provide known benefits to salmon or salmon habitat without the need for additional studies to demonstrate benefit, and

2. The action is feasible and can be implemented in the next two to four years as resources are identified, without extensive changes in existing social and institutional frameworks (defined as *doable* actions by the Steering Committee).

Actions that do not meet these criteria ultimately may be needed to recover threatened salmon. Such actions will be considered and possibly proposed as the Comprehensive Salmon Conservation Plan is developed. Readers should keep in mind this distinction between the Near-Term Action Agenda and the Comprehensive Salmon Conservation Plan.

The Near-Term Action Agenda is a guide to decision-making and action by local governments, businesses, community and environmental groups, and citizens. It identifies the types of projects, policies, programs, practices, and studies that have a high potential for benefiting salmon in WRIA 9 and can be used by local jurisdictions and other organizations in setting resource protection priorities over the next two to four years. In many cases, descriptions of actions are focused on outcomes so that governments and other institutions can decide the most effective method for implementation given the particular circumstances. In other cases, where one approach to implementation is clearly superior, actions are described in detail. Consequently, readers will note differences in the level of specificity of actions.

The Near-Term Action Agenda is not meant to be a static document. Of necessity, it is a snapshot based on what is known at the present time. As more is learned about salmon and their habitat needs in WRIA 9, other actions may assume greater priority. The final chapter of the Near-Term Action Agenda suggests a simple process to respond to new actions resulting from better understanding of the WRIA.

The Near-Term Action Agenda is not a compilation of all potentially beneficial actions. As more is learned about the connection between conservation actions and healthier salmon populations, other actions that were not identified in the Near-Term Action Agenda may emerge as equally important. This document should not be construed as a reason to reject other actions that careful consideration suggests will benefit listed salmon species.

Local governments in WRIA 9 (the 15 cities and King County) expect to take the lead in carrying out many of the provisions of the Near-Term Action Agenda during the period from 2002 to 2005. Other state and federal agencies, Tacoma Public Utilities, community and environmental groups, businesses, and citizens also have important roles to play in pursuing actions in support of salmon habitat improvements.

The Near-Term Action Agenda is the result of sustained commitment and intensive collaboration by the various stakeholders on the WRIA 9 Steering Committee and its subcommittees. An even greater level of commitment and collaboration will be required to transform the ideas presented on these pages into a reality between now and 2005. The actions in the Near-Term Action Agenda, if successfully carried out, will advance the WRIA toward the goal of sufficient high-quality habitat to support salmon recovery in the Green/Duwamish and Central Puget Sound watershed.